

# Four Good Losers in the Prize Letter Contest

THE following letters, one from each class of *Books and the Book World's* fourfold prize letter contest, were among those which, in their respective classes, stayed longest under the judges' consideration.

More of the unsuccessful letters will be published in future issues. The awards were announced and the winning letters published in the issue of Oct. 19.

### Publisher's Advertising.

TO THE EDITOR OF BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD—Sir: Publisher's advertising has certain definite limitations. The fact that each book is an isolated product and requires unique attention distinguishes book advertising from the advertising of other commodities. A corporation can spend a fortune introducing the public to "Sudsy" Soap, "Tempting" Biscuit, or "Ironsides" Tires. Once tried and accepted, the buyer will probably wash with "Sudsy," eat "Tempting" and motor on "Ironsides" for the remainder of his days. Book advertising on a similar scale would invite immediate bankruptcy, for the simple reason that one copy of any specific book satisfies the buyer's immediate need for that particular book.

We can, of course, take an Ibanez, a Harold Bell Wright or a Gene Stratton Porter and sell their books on the principle of "brute force" or "splurge" advertising by veritably impregnating the air with their names. That is, we can buy large space advertisements in the leading newspapers and magazines, print thousands of colored posters, and distribute "On Sale" copies for window displays to dealers. We can only do this, however, if we have potentially unlimited capital and a book of potentially unlimited appeal.

But what can be done for the book of purely artistic or intellectual appeal, in which class can be grouped the majority of non-fictional works? Ultimately the best way to sell books, those as well as fictional works, is to make people realize what reading really means—how necessary and how pleasurable it is to the full life. As Grant Overton observes, "the best way to sell birdseed is to put a canary in every home." The best way to sell books is to get people to read.

Why not, for this purpose, a cooperative campaign to which every publisher contributes on some just and proportional basis—such as has been successfully followed by Christmas card manufacturers?

Why not, as one of the steps in this campaign, advertise books in the terms of other pleasures, against such book competitors as an automobile ride, a card game, an expensive dinner or a theatre party? Perhaps most publishers assume that people already know all the delights of reading, and possibly they do, but the point will always bear stressing. More important still, we must sell books not only to the present circle of book buyers, but to that potential public of all who can read the printed word.

Here, in a nutshell, is the publisher's eternal question—how to reach this public with a maximum of advertising appeal, yet with a minimum of advertising expenditure. Although a general reading campaign might aid all publishers and "brute force" advertising cannot be excelled within the range of its limitations, nevertheless each individual publisher must have at his command an endless variety of economical methods for directly booming his own books.

Here, first of all, the publisher can well afford to get away from conventional triteness in his small space advertisements. He can do this in two ways—first by varying the number and choice of his advertising mediums, even to the extent of advertising certain books in selected car and bus lines; second, by varying the monotonous repetition of his copy. Although repetition is the mother of memory, it is usually the repetition with freshness of idea, originality of expression and novelty of typographical arrangement that not only attracts attention but compels sales.

As a variety of modest advertisement the circular and the circular letter are much underestimated. They are commonly used for sets and expensive books, but rarely for individual books of moderate price. This, despite the fact that many booksellers will pay postage on imprinted circulars or furnish the publisher with classified lists of customers interested in special subjects. It has been estimated that the minimum of orders resulting from circularization totals 3 per cent. Actually many booksellers have reported returns up to 10 per cent. to 40 per cent.

Electric advertising of books has (hitherto to the present) been almost ignored. For example, aside from the ingenious and comparatively inexpensive devices which have gone far to humanize the mausoleumlike atmosphere of many a book window, no publisher within our knowledge has ever advertised a best seller by a Broadway illuminated sign.

Why not, moreover, advertise books in the movies—like the local dealers who display animated advertisements? Why not reproduce in the films an illustration from a scientific work, a problem of economic theory, an example of culinary experimentation, and so on? Every book has certain pictorial values, quite apart from that particular kind of narrative pictorial value belonging to novels sold for film adaptation.

Finally, why not a revival of the book agent, to extend advertising and selling to those vast magazine reading sections of our country at present inaccessible to bookstores? Many attempts have been made to bring these districts within the range of the mail order business, but long distance stimulation of the reading habit is distressingly unsatisfactory. To be sure, the book agent of the past, armed with one book, too often a literary gold brick at that, is still a proverbial joke. Taking cognizance, however, of the success of the local magazine solicitors, every American community should have at least one resident book agent, a person of some education, with enthusiasm and a love of reading, who sells the books of all the publishers and is paid jointly by them. Armed with forty or fifty good books, current and classic, circulars, catalogues and attractive publicity, such an army of agents would bring nearer the publisher's millennium—the renaissance of the reading habit! And, as part of this same general movement, "Parnassus on Wheels" might be transmuted from a whimsical theory into a successful reality.

Brute force publicity, small advertisements, circulars and circular letters, electrical and movie advertising and book agents armed with literature—all these methods eat heavily into the publisher's expenditure. We must not ignore, however, the infinite possibilities of various forms of "free publicity," embracing methods as yet intangible and undeveloped. These also have innumerable potentialities for creating and sustaining the demand for books of every description.

Brentano's. LOWELL BRENTANO.  
Brentano's, Fifth avenue and 27th street, New York city.

### The Fun in Book Selling.

TO THE EDITOR OF BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD—Sir: What fun it is to sell books! What a lot of downright amusing and interesting experiences each day brings and oh, what a liberal education awaits "just a book clerk" if such a one happens to possess the kindly heart and the open mind!

I didn't dream, Mr. Editor, that I was opening a big door to individual culture—to say nothing of plain, every day happiness—when I took a place in the book department of a big store, becoming No. 593, at a salary of \$12 a week. Little did I think that behind the obnoxious number, with all it seemed to imply of a drop in the social scale, I was to find hidden treasure to which few have access.

As a matter of fact those of us who have conformed to the pattern impressed in the formal schools of the day have a supercilious attitude toward books. We "know" standard authors and classical literature and are familiar with books on a wide range of subjects—so we think. Isn't it silly to think we "know" books when we have only been "introduced" to so limitless a field! Instead of writing "commencement" at the end of a school career it would be much more correct to write "finis" in view of the general abandonment of further serious study.

Work in a book shop soon pricks this bubble of satisfaction. Customers ask for dozens of titles of which one has never heard and one comes from a search through voluminous catalogues chastened and humbled. Then begins the joy of making new acquaintances among books and the feast is on. There is a saying that "What one does not know cannot hurt one." Certainly what one does not know about books—in most cases—is an individual calamity. Think of missing *The Way of All Flesh*, *Green Mansions*, Tolstoi's *Confession*, Cabell's *Beyond Life*, *The Worn Doorstep*, *The Great Hunger*, *An American Idyll*—to mention only a few at random which have recently warmed the heart and stimulated the mind of "just a book clerk." "Familiar titles," you say. Yes—to the reviewer, to club women, to book lovers, but most unfamiliar to the rank and file, as we who serve the public taste in books so soon discover.

Customers, being human, like to talk about their book favorites, and here is a source of much valuable information to the clerk who has learned the gentle art

of listening. The hobbies people ride! How gladly they take you along in search of new material if your interest is genuine! You get the habit and develop reading hobbies to your own enrichment.

To offset the humility which a knowledge of the truth always brings, there is the discovery that a live book clerk, given a little time and experience, does come to know a great deal more about books in general than the average book customer. Not only does such a clerk know about books; he should be capable of good judgment in regard to their merits, having excellent opportunity for wide reading and comparative study of authors.

And so here we are, Mr. Editor, we book clerks, saying to our customers whenever we can, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?" (People are spending money on books, as many prolific authors can happily testify. If they listen and seem hungry, we give them good bread. I count it among my blessings to have been able to help some one stepping fearfully out of the seeming security of orthodox religious belief into the open spaces of—say—Emerson's philosophy. To have introduced others to good fiction, to poetry, to essays, to the real humorists, past and present, is to know the joy of real service. Talk about teaching or preaching or missionary work! Those so engaged might well envy the opportunities of the humble book clerk.

There is rare treasure in the juvenile book section. Can you think of a lovelier way to keep young than to read and sell books for boys and girls? A wide acquaintance among the book people whom children love means travel in enchanting lands where it is always morning. Such a wealth of color and artistry is now employed in the manufacture of juvenile editions that to browse among them is a never ending delight. To love children's books is to love children and to love and take delight in children is to keep the singing heart because of the discovery

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*The Face of the World* has just been published and is for sale at all bookshops for \$1.75 net. It is published by Moffat, Yard and Company, New York.

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### Other Books by Amy Lowell

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